

Andrew Jackson to David Burford, July 28, 1831, from Correspondence of Andrew Jackson. Edited by John Spencer Bassett.

TO DAVID BURFORD.¹

¹ The copy, signed by Jackson, is in Nicholas P. Trist's handwriting. Burford lived at Dixon's Springs, Tenn. He was prominent as a state politician and a few years later served as speaker of the state's senate.

Washington, July 28, 1831.

Private

My Dear Sir: I have the pleasure to acknowledge the receipt of your very friendly letter of the 3rd Inst.; for which I sincerely thank you. It is only through such friends as yourself that I am informed of the *Slang* of the times, which is put forth for political effect. And as the surest evidence that I properly appreciate the motives which prompted your communication, and feel grateful to you for it, I snatch a moment, from the discharge of public duties, which press upon me, to answer it. Professed friends, but enemies in disguise, are much more dangerous than *open* enemies, and, untill detected, they are calculated to do most harm. I was not, therefore, astonished to receive the report you have given me of Genl. Desha. I have long since been advised of his being one of the Satellites of J. C. Calhoun, Ingham, and co., and hence you can well suppose that his course of conduct does, by no means, excite my surprise. It is only necessary to draw your attention to the recent movements of Duff Green, Ingham, Berrien, and Co, in order to convince you that no confidence ought *ever* to have been reposed in them, and, that, whenever they

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approached me, I ought to have had some man of truth present to have shielded me from their *Combined* misrepresentations and Slanders.

I am sure that there cannot be one honest man, in America, who does not *now* approve the "removal" of Ingham, Branch and Berrien from my Cabinet. It's harmony was disturbed and the public business interrupted by these men *secretly* entering into the intrigues of Mr. J. C. Calhoun. It is positively untrue that Ingham and Branch, as reported to you by Genl. Desha, were not invited to my Cabinet Council. There never was one to which they were not invited and at which they were not *present*. It is true that I had, and still have great confidence in Mr. Van Buren and Majr. Eaton; they never have and I am sure never will betray it. And it almost seems useless for me, after you have viewed the treacherous conduct of Ingham, Branch and Berrien, to inform you that they were wholly unworthy of the *least* degree of my confidence, and were the Secret agents of J. C. Calhoun to whose interest Genl. Desha was devoted, notwithstanding he well knew with what duplicity and hypocrisy Calhoun had acted towards me.

I will give you a few facts for your own information. You have seen Mr. Calhoun's *book* in which he places before the nation, the Correspondence between him and myself, accompanied with his own notes and comments to mistify it and bewilder and mislead the public mind; you have seen me charged, by him, with having transcended my orders on the Seminole campaign; you have seen him acknowledge (in his book) that it was him, and not Mr. Crawford, as was stated in the public journals of 1818, that moved my arrest, or punishment, in the secret Cabinet council held on that occasion, and this acknowledgement is made too after having denied to Genl. Desha (as the General informed me) that he ever had made such a motion; you have seen published in the same *book, without my consent*, my confidential letter of the 6th of January 1818 to Mr. Munroe, and an acknowledgement, by Mr. Calhoun, that he read this letter, and remarked to Mr. Munroe that it was on the affairs of Florida and required his attention and answer; you have perceived, in that confidential letter, that Mr. J. Rhea was mentioned as a confidential person through whom Mr. Munroe could, with safety, communicate to me his wishes,

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and my promise to execute them in sixty days after their receipt; and you have also seen the public orders under which I acted, and that they were a *chart Blanch* , by which, as Mr. Calhoun explained in a letter to Gov. Bibb, I was authorized to conduct the war as I pleased. My public orders were not only thus explained; but Mr. Calhoun (who was in the entire confidence of Mr. Munroe) must have known that Mr. Rhea, by the instructions of Mr. Munroe, had answered the confidential letter to which I have alluded, and fully approved the views I, therein, submitted

It is clear then that Mr. Calhoun did know that I had not transcended my orders; but, on the contrary, had fulfilled them to a *tittle* , and accomplished the secret wishes of Mr. Munroe *expressed* to me thro' Mr. J. Rhea, who had been pointed out as an individual in whom the most implicit confidence might, safely, be reposed. What then can you think of Mr. Calhoun, who was capable, after being fully possessed of all this knowledge, and whilst, in all his letters to me and conversations with my friends, he professed the strongest friendship for me,² and approbated my conduct in the Floridas, of moving, in the secret cabinet council, my arrest or punishment, and thus causing the proceedings in Congress against me in 1818 and “19? It is this man of deceptive conduct, with his vacillation in politics, and nullification doctrines, whom Genl. Desha, Ingham, Duff Green, Berrien, and Co. wish to *force* into the Presidential chair. And their conduct indicates a determination to prostrate all who will not fall down and worship their Idol; but there is consolation in the reflection that

2 If anyone doubts that Calhoun did indeed play the flatterer to Jackson during this period in which he was climbing into the vice-presidency and hoping for the presidency, let him read his letters to Jackson in this work dated Apr. 8, 1821, Mar. 30, July 31, 1823, and June 4, 1826, *ante* (vol. III., pp. 46, 193, 201, 304).

theirs is not the will of the people, who, (unlike themselves) having no motive to err, are honest, and, when informed, will award Justice to every man. But the duplicity of Mr. Calhoun did not end with the foregoing narration.

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I came to this city by the advice of my friends in 1819, pending the debate in the house of Representatives on the resolutions of Clay and Cobb, and had the fullest and strongest confidence in the friendship and support of Mr. Calhoun. In the honesty of my own heart, and conscious of the purity of my own motives, I confided in Mr. Calhoun's professions of friendship and approbation of my conduct which I received from all quarters, and regarded him high minded and honourable, and could not, therefore, suppose him capable of duplicity, or hear, with patience, any insinuations against him. When thus innocent of the existence of any improper motive, and under the full influence of my confidence in Mr. Calhoun, Mr. Rhea (then in Congress) was sent to me to request that I would burn his confidential letter wrote to me, at the instance of Mr. Munroe, in answer to mine of the 6th of January 1818. The debate having ended in the house, and, conscious of no wrong in myself suspected none in others, I said to Mr. Rhea that it should be burned as soon as I returned home. And accordingly I did burn it, altho' Mr. Lacock had revived the subject in the senate. I could not indulge even a suspicion that this request, coming as it did from Mr. Munroe thro' Mr. J. Rhea, was made to injure me by depriving me of the benefit of the testimony contained in this letter; for I did believe that, should it ever be necessary for its contents to be known, neither Mr. Munroe or Mr. Calhoun would deny the existence of the facts. I was willing to assume any responsibility that the case might require so long as the government would retain, for the benefit of my Country, the advantages Secured to it by the Seminole campaign.

It is now believed that this subject was taken up in the Senate in consequence of the secret intrigues of Mr. Calhoun to arrest and crush, what he considered, my growing popularity, by counteracting, if possible, the effects which the decision of the House of Representatives might have on the public mind. But be this as it may, there is, surely, stronger presumptive evidence against Mr. Calhoun than he has against Mr. VanBuren in respect to "plots" with which he has charged him. The burning of this confidential letter or my promise that it would be burned was made known to Mr. Munroe by Mr. Rhea, and you perceive, from the Book of Mr. Calhoun, that the moment he is detected in his duplicity

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by the statement of Mr. Crawford (Mr. Rhea's letter being burned) he acknowledges "that he did move for my arrest or punishment," and adds insult to injury by urging that I had transcended my orders. Providence has permitted Mr. Rhea to live and see this *book*, and, on reading it, he addressed a letter to Mr. Munroe verifying all the facts stated in this letter on this subject, and has placed in my hands a certified copy of the Same. In coroboration of his statement, I have Judge Overton's certificate stating the existence of said letter, which, with other confedential letters, was put into his hands when he wrote the defence of the Executive and his command'g Genl. on the Seminole War, and that this letter was in the proper hand-writing of Mr. J. Rhea, and that, after I returned from Washington in 1819, I told him I had burned it.

From this statement of facts, you will be able to judge, to some extent, of the capacity of Mr. Calhoun to intrigue, and whether he has not been crying plot, plot, plot when, at the same time, he has been plotting to disturb the harmony of my cabinet, to injure me, and to prevent the people, who have again, contrary to my wishes, placed my name before the nation for a second election, from electing me, and to secure his own elevation. If the people, in whose hands I have always been, prefer him to me I shall be content. If it be their will, founded on their unbiased judgement, I will, with pleasure, retire to my peacefull Hermitage. It is because Majr. Eaton would not become the suppliant instrument in the hands of Mr. Calhoun and support his ambitious views; and Mr. Van Buren, by a laborous attention to the duties assigned him, *had acquired for himself*, in connection with my administration, an elevated rank for his talents and skill in our arrangements with Foreign nations, that Ingham, Branch and Berrien, operated upon by Mr. Calhoun, were intriguing to destroy them, and injure me. Such injustice I never will countenance, nor will I ever support an intriguer whose sole object appers to be to raise himself on the ruins of others.

Regardless of what Genl. Desha may choose to say of my predilections, I declare to you that I meddle not with elections,³ I leave the people to make their own President, and my cabinet, so far as I can controal such matters, shall not interfere. We have enough to do when we confine ourselves to our own *proper* duties, and whenever any of my present

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cabinet, (none of whom do I suspect) like some of the last, become electionerers, and thus disturb its harmony, they shall, that moment, receive the same fate which has been decreed to others thus circumstanced. But I must close for the present with one passing remark in reference to the information given "that (I) had desired Genl. Daniel S Donelson to support Mr. Burton against Genl. Hall." I pronounce this statement positively untrue. I have never spoken to Genl. Donelson on the subject of the Canvass between Genl. Hall and Mr. Burton. The latter is married to the full cousin of Genl. Don[e]lson and a favourite Neice of My dear Mrs. Jackson, and daughter of her favourite brother whose welfare I most sincerely wish. In the election of her husband I have in no way or manner interfered. This letter is not for publication; but, if you think proper, you are at liberty to shew it to Genls. Desha and Donelson and Genl Hall as their names are mentioned in it.⁴ and such of your neighbours who may have been imposed on by Genl Deshas misrepresentation

³ Burford had told Jackson that it was reported in Tennessee that he, Jackson, was taking part in a hotly contested canvass for speaker of the Tennessee senate.

⁴ The words from "and" to the end are in Jackson's handwriting.

I am, very Respectfully, Yr friend. ³